

FAMILY ASSISTANCE CENTER: OPERATION SOLACE

By Barbara Cienfuegos Engleman, LACDMH EOB/PMRT



A full-scale, “hands-on” exercise took place on Wednesday, January 23, 2013. This event brought together many city and county departments, law enforcement, outside agencies and jurisdictions under one roof to practice stepping into the role of a Family Assistance Center staff member.

NTSB staff member Max Green was quoted as saying, “I have never seen such local cooperation.” All the key players who would normally respond to a mass fatality event were there.

Staff carried out duties based on their professional area of expertise in support of the overall mission to provide information and assistance to families of disaster victims.



The exercise tested:

- **Simulation** of Family Assistance Center activation and operations, including the use of a probable Family Assistance Center location
- **Utilization** of staff who would likely participate as Family Assistance Center staff in a real world event
- **Delivery and evaluation** of Just-in-Time Training
- **Simulation** of key activation and operation processes, including the coordination and conduct of client briefings, client form completion, and identification and notification of victim status
- **Utilization** of actors to simulate the role of clients

The Family Assistance Center provides two types of benefits for families of disaster victims:

- **Information.** This includes notifying families of the status of the victim (e.g., whether the victim is a decedent, has been transported to a hospital, or is still missing) and the provision of updates regarding incident recovery efforts.
- **Services.** Emotional support, spiritual care, health and social services.



The Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health, in partnership with an Operational Area Steering Committee, hosted this event. Los Angeles City was the jurisdiction where the simulated explosion took place and began the “set-up” of the event.

There were people that flew into LA from all over the United States just to attend this extremely successful event. For more information, please e-mail me (Barbara Cienfuegos Engleman) or call (213) 738-3440.